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ACTION ARA-14

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O R 161712Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0705
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY NASSAU
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY RC DATE 20 JUN 1982
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 7556

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, JM, JM
SUBJECT: JLP TO BOYCOTT ELECTIONS IN ABSENCE OF ELECTORAL REFORMS

1. THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE OF THE OPPOSITION JAMAICA LABOUR PARTY (JLP) ANNOUNCED ON DECEMBER 14 THAT THE PARTY WILL NOT CONTEST ANY FURTHER ELECTIONS OR BY-ELECTIONS UNTIL APPROPRIATE ELECTORAL REFORMS HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED. IN ANNOUNCING THE DECISION, THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE SAID THAT THE PARTY HAS REPEATEDLY URGED ELECTORAL REFORMS BUT THAT THE RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PARTY (PNP) HAS VIRTUALLY IGNORED ITS DEMANDS. IT STRESSED THAT IN OCTOBER, A PARLIAMENTARY SLEECT COMMITTEE WAS APPOINTED TO EXAMINE THE JAMAICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM (SEE KINGSTON 5826) BUT IT HAS NOT YET MET.

2. COMMENT: THE JLP'S OPPOSITION TO THE PRESENT SYSTEM LIES IN THE CONVICTION THAT IT IS SUSCEPTIBLE OF EASY MANIPULATION BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DAY AND THAT SUCH MANIPULATION WAS THE CAUSE OF THE JLP'S MASSIVE DEFEAT IN LAST YEAR'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. THE ELECTORAL
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IT STAFF THUS IS SUBJECT TO MINISTERIAL CONTROL. THE JLP HAS URGED TO CREATION OF AN AUTONOMOUS ELECTION COMMISSION.

3. THE JLP ANNOUNCEMENT COMES HARD ON THE HEELS OF A SPATE OF RUMORS OF IMPENDING CABINET CHANGES WHICH SHOULD LEAD TO BY-ELECTIONS (KINGSTON 7408). IN ADDITION, IT FOLLOWS JUDICIAL DECISIONS DECLARING VACANT TWO PARISH COUNCIL SEATS AND NECESSITATING PARISH ELECTIONS. THUS, THE ANNOUNCEMENT HAS IMMEDIACY. IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT WILL, HOWEVER, MOVE THE PNP TOWARD ACCOMMODATION ON THE ELECTORAL REFORM ISSUE, PARTICULARLY SINCE IT CLAIMS THAT THE PROBLEM MUST BE ADDRESSED AS PART OF THE OVERALL CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM NOW IN PROGRESS. NEVERTHELESS, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE JLP DOES HOPE THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT WILL SERVE TO EMBARRASS THE RULING PARTY WHICH HAS TAKEN CONSIDERABLE SATISFACTION IN THE RECENT FINDINGS THAT ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD IS GOOD. IT ALSO SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE JLP ANNOUNCEMENT WAS DELIBERATELY TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH PM MANLEY'S ARRIVAL IN WASHINGTON FOR DECEMBER 16 MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT.
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